

March 10, 2005

Honorable Ida Chong  
Minister of Advanced Education  
Room 247, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

**RE: February 22nd Vancouver Sun Lead Story  
"BC gets failing grade in services for immigrants" (see attached)**

Dear Minister Chong,

We are writing in order to register our concerns over the misconceptions this story has conveyed to the public in BC.

We represent the instructors at Vancouver Community College (VCC), which has for over 30 years been the largest provider of ESL for adult immigrants in BC. We are well aware of the key roles the federal and provincial governments have played and continue to play in providing funding and supporting programming for ESL services.

We feel it is necessary to point out that this story was based on a flawed study, called "A System in Crisis: 2004 Inter-Provincial Report Card on Language and Settlement Services in Canada." It is available at the following website:  
[www.immigrantsandrefugees.ca](http://www.immigrantsandrefugees.ca)

In its Executive Summary it states, "The Province of British Columbia .... retains 48% or \$17.4 million (2003/04) of immigrant settlement program funding within the consolidated general revenue fund." This makes it sound as if that money goes to Departments like highways or forests. However, as the authors of the study well know, this full amount does go to ESL and settlement services through the Ministry of Advanced Education and through other departments.

At VCC alone we have over 1650 full-time-equivalent students taking ESL as fee-payers. Everyone knows that they are supported by government funding. Using a college average of \$5000 in funding per FTE, that's fully \$8.25 million worth of government funding used for ESL language instruction at VCC alone that can be sourced back to the provincial and federal governments. This amount is not included in the study, nor are corresponding amounts at other BC colleges. Why not?

The authors of the study must answer for themselves, but it is a misrepresentation for them to purport to show that only Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) or equivalent programming should be included in "language services in Canada." For thirty years we have had a different approach in BC with a mixture of fee-paying programming

and non-fee-paying programming. The authors of the study know it. They should have included both in their report.

Over the decades BC college ESL instructors have developed sophisticated multi-faceted approaches. At VCC we have developed combined ESL--vocational or ESL--professional skills classes, self-paced learning approaches, and several specialty classes. Because we are in a community college we can link people up to affordable job-oriented programming either at VCC or at other colleges and institutes that gets people working as soon as possible. We do our part in addressing the looming skill shortage and in unlocking the skills of immigrants who need professionally-presented English in order to use the skills they have or to move on to further academic or non-academic training.

There has been a long standing consensus in BC that after a certain point immigrants should pay reasonable and comparable fees for ESL classes at colleges just as non-ESL students do. Of course, we often disagree with other stakeholders regarding the level of those fees, but there has always been widespread acknowledgement that the fact that fees are paid supports a wider political consensus on the appropriateness of offering ESL programming in colleges. It also can be argued that it allows colleges to vary their approaches to ESL and, in fact, to serve more students than would be possible through solely non-fee-paying approaches.

While we know you and your officials are aware of BC's approach and that government's efforts to provide language training do not deserve a letter grade of "F," we understand that the group behind this study is going to continue their lobbying efforts based on their misrepresentations.

We therefore want to you to know that we will be doing what we can to counter those points and to present a more balanced view.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office should you require more information.

Yours truly,

**VCC Faculty Association**

Lizz Lindsay  
President